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# Roy Harris's *Symphony 1933*: Biographical Myth-Making and Liberal Myth-Building in the American West

Emily MacGregor

The moods which seem particularly American to me are the noisy ribaldry, the sadness, a groping earnestness which amounts to suppliance towards those deepest spiritual yearnings within ourselves; there is little grace or mellowness in our midst; that will probably come after we have passed the high noon of our growth as a people.

Roy Harris (1935), quoted in: Nicolas Slonimsky, "Roy Harris," *Musical Quarterly* 33 (1947): 23-24.<sup>1</sup>

American composer Roy Harris (1898–1979) was a figurehead for an American identity that reified the sovereignty of the individualist frontiersman alongside the American West. Considered in the later 1920s and 1930s one of the leading emergent young voices in US music alongside figures like Aaron Copland – and likewise a product of Nadia Boulanger's Parisian composition school – Harris aimed to forge a sound-world that listeners would recognise as 'American'.<sup>2</sup> Tapping into a nostalgic mythology prevalent in Depression-era Americana film and fiction, composers like Harris responded to the anxieties about European cultural and political dominance that contributed to the era's isolationist politics. For Harris, a central musical apparatus in this project of sonic nationalism was the symphony, a genre whose significance for assembling a distinctive American musical voice and national identity has been well established.<sup>3</sup> Over his career he composed sixteen symphonies, many with explicitly 'American' themes clarified by subtitles such as *Folksong Symphony* (no. 4), *Gettysburg* (no. 6), and *Abraham Lincoln* (no. 10).

In the above-quoted 1947 *Musical Quarterly* article on Harris, Nicolas Slonimsky cast the composer as a spokesperson for American identity in a way that illuminates the stakes for musical biography vis-à-vis identity politics. (The missing citation indicates how inconsistently standards of accuracy were applied in the nationalist myth-building around Harris.) Harris's words expressed American subjectivity,

<sup>1</sup> Slonimsky does not reference any source for this passage, purportedly dating to 1935, and I have been unable to locate its origin.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Aaron Copland, "The Composer in America, 1923-1933," *Modern Music* 10 (1933): 90. Throughout this chapter, 'American' is used to refer to US identity, echoing its use in the source material. Yet I do this with qualification: it is a reminder of the US's historical success in colonising a word that in many contexts refers to the Americas as a whole.

<sup>3</sup> Examples include: Nicholas Tawa, *The Great American Symphony: Music, the Depression, and War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Alan Howard Levy, *Musical Nationalism: American Composers' Search for Identity* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983); John Canarina, "The American Symphony," in *A Guide to the Symphony*, ed. Robert Layton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

meaning a sense of selfhood or consciousness that operates at both an individual and a collective level, as suspended between simultaneously outwards and inwards striving impulses – ‘noisy ribaldry’ contrasts with the introspection of ‘deep spiritual yearnings within ourselves’. Interpreting Harris’s pronouncements even more ambitiously, however, Slonimsky isolated the territorial traction of this tension, explicitly harnessing Harris’s music to the landscape of the American West in which Harris grew up. Slonimsky read this passage ideologically as a ‘programme of musical Americanism’. Not content with Harris’s music simply evoking the ‘great open spaces of [the composer’s] original habitat’, he argued that Harris’s philosophical Americanism ‘goes far beyond the frontiers of the West.’<sup>4</sup>

The way Slonimsky used Harris to elucidate American identity captures a constellation of ideological processes by which the biographical myth-making around musical figures negotiates the gap between individual and collective identities in the national imagination. Understanding this wider phenomenon is significant for advancing scholarship in musical biography, and is the primary concern of this article. Alongside the imaginative role played by the American West in oiling the mechanisms of biographical myth-making, the article considers the critical role of the symphonic genre, in light of historical assertions about the symphony’s ability to mediate ideas of individual and communal identity.

My discussion centres on Harris’s very early reception: the myth-making around the premiere of his *Symphony 1933* (or Symphony no. 1), excavated thoroughly by Beth E. Levy as part of her investigation into how what she calls Harris’s ‘Western mythology’ first crystallised. Commissioned by the renowned conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Serge Koussevitzky, in the spring of the title year, and premiered at the Boston Symphony Hall in January 1934, it was the work that gave Harris his first taste of major public recognition, consolidating his emerging reputation. The reviewers embedded the symphony and its white composer in a collectively imagined, idealised Western landscape, biographically linking Harris’s romanticised Scotch-Irish American subjectivity and the landscape to imply – falsely – that their relationship was immanent and organic. Using the reviews of *Symphony 1933*, Levy explains

<sup>4</sup> Slonimsky, “Roy Harris,” 24-25.

how Harris and the contemporary commentators were invested in blending fact and fiction to collectivise Harris's biography as symbolic of a recognisably American heroic identity and uniquely American experience, distinct from those of Europe.<sup>5</sup>

Levy's analysis and contextualisation of this moment of reception history deserve further recognition for how they illuminate biographical construction as a historical process, and reveal a blend of press reception, identity politics, musical discourse, and US history as some of its determinants. Her work thus sets up rich possibilities for this article, which oscillates between considering biographical construction and some broader historical, social, and musical contexts that reciprocally shape it. In so doing, I point to some potential directions for pursuing musical biography's interdisciplinary intersections, stressing in particular the significance of reception history for biographical myth-making, but also indicating potential crossover with diverse areas such as cultural geography, legal discourses about sovereignty and ownership, and socio-political analyses of liberalism.

The critics and commentators constructed a biographical myth around Harris that legitimised the power of white racial groups in the US in a very specific way: by naturalising their presence on the plains of the colonial West. This article thus contributes to a broader disciplinary discussion concerning the contingency between musical biography and imagined (Western) landscapes. It is in dialogue with work that considers the profound role of ideas of landscape in conditioning notions of national 'authenticity' as part of nation-building narratives and cultural nostalgia in North America and elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Yet the example of Harris invites us overtly to acknowledge the historical practice of biographical writing as complicit in racially deterministic power structures, and thus encourages us to write about musical biography from a place of deeper discomfort about the hegemonies in which it is implicated.

<sup>5</sup> See Beth E. Levy, "'The White Hope of American Music': Or, How Roy Harris Became Western," *American Music* 19 (2001); Levy, *Frontier Figures: American Music and the Mythology of the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Denise Von Glahn, *The Sounds of Place: Music and the American Cultural Landscape* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003); Von Glahn, *Music and the Skillful Listener: American Women Compose the Natural World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993); further outside of the American context see, for example, Daniel M. Grimley, *Grieg: Music, Landscape, and Norwegian Identity* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006); Grimley, "Landscape and Distance: Vaughan Williams and the Modernist Pastoral," in *Music and British Modernism, 1890-1930*, eds. Matthew Riley and Paul Rodmell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010); Julian Johnson, *Webern and the Transformation of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

The first part of this article examines the documentation surrounding the work's first performances, cutting a different path over the historical ground covered extensively by Levy. Drawing on her research alongside my own examination of primary sources, especially correspondence, programmes, and reviews, I explore how Harris's biographical connection with landscape ties in to deeply embedded liberal discourses about ownership that intertwine sovereignty and property, illuminating some of the ideological means by which biographical connections with the landscape were legitimised as part of a broad colonial project of westward expansionism and appropriation.<sup>7</sup> In this context, liberalism refers to the political ideology whose central precept is that enshrining the autonomy of the individual benefits society as a whole, and whose beginnings roughly coincide with the Enlightenment. Indeed, the colonised West has always been a contradictory and highly ideological imagined space, on the one hand promising the seemingly empty coordinates of which the pioneering individual is master, affording free motion and infinite geographical expansion beyond the limits of vision, but on the other being mapped, measured, and dissected into discrete units of property. The article traces some of the historical foundations for these tensions in the notions of space and American identity at the centre of the Harris 'myth' back to late eighteenth-century landscape politics that coincide with a decisive era for the symphonic genre and its ideological inflections.

Moving conclusively beyond the scope of Levy's arguments, then, the primary analytical focus of my article concerns the liberal ideological underpinnings of the Harris 'myth' and its contradictions, which uncovers ways of understanding the role of musical discourse as one of the means by which conflicts inherent within liberalism, that underpinned the imagined space of the West, were occluded and sustained. I align the tensions in the construction of the West within the reception of Harris with a core tension in the spatial narrative of American liberalism, articulated by Martin Bruckner and Hsuan L. Hsu, following Philip Fisher, as 'an abstract, infinitely expandable, and easily damaged "democratic social

<sup>7</sup> The sources I have examined are from the Roy Harris Papers and related collections at the Music Division of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter 'Harris Papers'). Levy's work draws largely on archival material from the Roy Harris Archive at California State University, Los Angeles.

space”<sup>8</sup> Harris and his symphony are integrally situated in this liberal spatial narrative. Rhetoric inspired by the contradictory imagined Western landscapes central to Harris’s biography converge with existing critical rhetoric associated with the symphonic genre. These include expansionist discourses – that is, the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century drive to create ever larger symphonic structures, reflecting maximalist agendas in Germanic philosophy – and how the genre historically has been aligned with the liberal philosophy of the bourgeois public sphere, as Margaret Notley and Benjamin Korstvedt (among others) have shown.<sup>9</sup> I suggest that all these elements mutually reinforce one another. These overlapping critical discourses strengthen the hold and power of the West in the historical imagination, bolstering the communal national identity for which the Harris ‘myth’ stands.<sup>10</sup> Shaped by contemporary ideals and anxieties, this was a particularly urgent narrative in Depression-struck America, where economic collapse meant the mass dispossession and westward exodus of agricultural workers, set against the backdrop of the transition into a wage economy, the division of labour, and the alienation of workers from the land.

This work also forms a component of my wider comparative research considering the genre of the symphony in the year 1933, which explores its complicity in establishing and perpetuating hegemonic ideologies and the privileging of elite social groups in Germany, France, and the US.<sup>11</sup> Tethered historically to the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment intellectual context that saw widespread idealisation of the sovereign artist, the symphony has always, in a sense, been a liberal project. Particularly in Germany and Austria, both the symphony itself and the written discourse around it have intersected with the political concerns of liberalism throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, grappling with questions about the relationship between individual sovereignty and mass

<sup>8</sup> Martin Brückner and Hsuan L. Hsu, *American Literary Geographies: Spatial Practice and Cultural Production, 1500-1900* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 20.

<sup>9</sup> See Margaret Notley, *Lateness and Brahms: Music and Culture in the Twilight of Viennese Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 156-60; Benjamin M. Korstvedt, “Reading Music Criticism beyond the Fin-de-siècle Vienna Paradigm,” *The Musical Quarterly*, 94 (2011): 156-210, 172. See also: Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Levy, “‘The White Hope of American Music’,” 131.

<sup>11</sup> Emily MacGregor, “The Symphony in 1933” (DPhil, University of Oxford, 2016).

publics, and about community-formation and the national imagination.<sup>12</sup> Harris's biographical connection with Western landscapes illustrates how musical biography, in parallel with the music itself, can negotiate the relationship between a composer's identity, the geographical space in which it is located, and formulations of national identity.

### ***Symphony 1933* and the Harris 'Myth'**

Aaron Copland introduced Harris to Koussevitzky and thus secured Harris's first major commission, when the composers attended one of music patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge's Festival chamber concerts at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. in April 1933. Although Harris's own accounts of his biography can be unreliable, he claimed that Koussevitzky had specifically asked for 'a big symphony from the West', setting up from the outset the metaphorical terrain of its reception.<sup>13</sup> Harris began work on the symphony immediately, completing the first two movements in Coolidge's Washington apartment, which Coolidge had generously allowed Harris and his wife, Hilda, to occupy free of charge in her absence.<sup>14</sup> At the end of May, Harris quipped in a letter to Copland: 'Koussevitzky piece is fulminating. It will have lots of surge in it. Quel Pun.'<sup>15</sup> Ready for Koussevitzky in late December,<sup>16</sup> *Symphony 1933* was premiered on 26 and 27 January 1934. Judging from Harris's letter to

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Mark Evan Bonds, *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Margaret Notley, *Lateness and Brahms: Music and Culture in the Twilight of Viennese Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> On Harris's unreliability see Levy, "'The White Hope of American Music,'" 132-33. Levy (ibid., 145.) quotes what she believes to be the most detailed record of the circumstances of the commission, an excerpt from a 1966 oral history review: 'Koussevitzky said, "Copland has told me about you (I know about you already from Nadia Boulanger), but Copland says you are the American Mussorgsky."

You see? And we had a laugh about it.

He said, "You must write me a symphony."

So I said, "What kind of symphony?"

And he said, "Oh, I want a big symphony from the West."

There is some reason to doubt this version of events: Levy's observation that the 'big symphony from the West' anecdote only appears in sources from 1951 onwards is telling, although she also points to evidence that supports its credibility, such as Copland's anecdote about Koussevitzky telling his orchestra, 'The next Beethoven vill from Colorado come!' See ibid., 163; Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900-1942* (New York: St. Martin's, 1984), 109.

<sup>14</sup> See letter from Hilda Harris to Coolidge, 11 November 1933, box 38, Correspondence from the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Harris to Copland, 31 May 1933, box 256, Aaron Copland Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>16</sup> There is some uncertainty in the literature about precisely when Harris completed the symphony. Levy notes that 'Harris began work sometime between March and June 1933 and finished the scoring sometime between September and December of that year.' See Levy, "'The White Hope of American Music,'" 163. I have focused the timeline of completion more

Coolidge after the Boston performances, the concerts were a resounding triumph, although the professional and diplomatic nature of Harris's relationship with Coolidge makes description in any other terms unlikely: 'The Symphony sounded and was received with a success beyond my wildest hopes. Dr. Koussevitzky gave me a wonderful performance – with insight and technical precision – and deep conviction.'<sup>17</sup> The symphony was then repeated and recorded live for Columbia Records' Masterworks series at Carnegie Hall in New York one week later, on 2 and 3 February, becoming the first American symphony to be reproduced for the phonograph. In spite of its frostier reception in New York, Harris's enthusiasm for the recording project was clear. As he reported to Slonimsky in February 1934: 'The Symphony was recorded and we believe [it] will be a knockout. The head engineer said he had never officiated over a clearer score – and that the balance was very even.'<sup>18</sup>

Harris's biographical connection with an idealised sense of the American West was strongly evoked in reviews of the symphony, yielding important consequences for the construction of an American identity that, despite its pretensions to hold for all Americans, was nonetheless specifically racialised as white. The West's nostalgic spaces soothed modernist anxieties about urban life and were vital, as Levy observes, to the nurturing of the Harris 'myth', which entwined a kind of essentialised American subjectivity characterised by its pragmatism and an idealised notion of Western landscapes. In their 2010 essay collection *Philosophy and the Western*, Jennifer L. McMahon and B. Steve Csaki summarise the West's mythological, utopian status as 'a wild, untouched land of terrain laden with golden opportunities.'<sup>19</sup> Reviews of the premiere of Harris's symphony drew on the key tropes corresponding to the mythic

precisely by examining some ancillary correspondence. Harris was at Yaddo in Saratoga Springs in October, 'to finish my symphony', as he telegraphed Coolidge. See telegram from Harris to Coolidge, 3 October 1933, box 38, Coolidge Collection. In November, Hilda wrote to Coolidge that 'Roy is hard at work on the third movement of his symphony now, and the whole thing, with parts, will be ready for Dr. Koussevitzky by Christmas.' Letter from Hilda Harris to Coolidge, 16 November 1933, box 38, Coolidge Collection. The following month, Harris wrote to Slonimsky: 'Koussevitzky told me he will not program the work until the parts are in his hands. And as the programs are made up in advance + publicity etc – I am determined to have it ready for him by New Years. So I can send him a telegram with a flourish. I want him to feel confident in my integrity.' Letter from Harris to Slonimsky, December 1933, box 143, Nicolas Slonimsky Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Harris to Coolidge, n.d., box 38, Coolidge Collection.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Harris to Slonimsky (?February 1934?), box 143, Slonimsky Collection.

<sup>19</sup> Jennifer L. McMahon and B. Steve Csaki, *The Philosophy of the Western* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010).



West, being heavily strewn with metaphors associating landscape, masculinity, and organicism.<sup>20</sup> Henry Taylor Parker from the *Boston Evening Transcript* characterised what he heard as sounding ‘American, first, in a pervading directness, in a recurring and unaffected roughness of musical speech – an outspoken symphony.’ Musically, too, the symphony was complicit in American myth-building, even if reviewers’ explanations of precisely how the symphony musically represented the West were unspecific. To quote Parker again, the ‘propulsive force’ of the uneven rhythms and melodic scope ‘seem to derive ... from the West that bred Mr Harris and in which he works most eagerly – from its air, its life, its impulses, even its gaits.’<sup>21</sup> Harris’s symphony thrust forward, in language suggesting both masculine sexuality and the propulsive ‘modern’ mechanised transportation that facilitated free passage through the West. Moses Smith of the *Boston Evening American* conflated the same assemblage of ideas: ‘The music is virile. It has a destination’;<sup>22</sup> similarly, in the *Boston Herald* George S. McManus described the work’s ‘rugged, driving sincerity’, eliding masculinity and the landscape with the word ‘rugged’.<sup>23</sup> In a somewhat more oblique reference to motion and propulsion invested with potent sexual energy, ‘vigor’ was a word that frequently recurred in the criticism. Francis D. Perkins described the ‘vigor of the work’;<sup>24</sup> Moses Smith complimented the ‘breadth and vigor of many of its melodies’;<sup>25</sup> W. J. Henderson observed ‘vigor in all the score’.<sup>26</sup>

Later in his review Parker went on to state that ‘Next to never does [Harris’s melody] proceed in measured sequences. From a germ his themes broaden and lengthen in a fashion strange to the short-breathed musical hour’, ultimately rendering ‘an instinctive American quality to which we respond [just]

<sup>20</sup> Extracts from selected reviews of these concerts and the associated recording are published in Dan Stehman, *Roy Harris: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991). Other reviews are to be found in scrapbooks in the Harris Papers, and via ProQuest Historical Newspapers. I have noted the location of the source where clarity is required.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Taylor Parker, “Manifold, Abundant, Individual,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, 27 January 1934.

<sup>22</sup> Moses Smith, “Stravinsky’s Ballet Feature of Program at Symphony,” *Boston Evening American*, 27 January 1934; found in: Harris Papers, box 42.

<sup>23</sup> George S. McManus, “Music,” *Boston Herald*, 27 January 1934, 4. This review is cited in: Stehman, *Roy Harris: A Bio-Bibliography*, 377.

<sup>24</sup> Francis D. Perkins, “Koussevitzky Presents ‘1933’ By Roy Harris,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 3 February 1934. This review is cited in: Stehman, *Roy Harris: A Bio-Bibliography*, 379.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, ‘Stravinsky’s Ballet Feature of Program at Symphony’.

<sup>26</sup> W. J. Henderson, “Roy Harris Work Played By Boston Symphony,” *New York Sun*, n.d.; found in Harris’s scrapbook of *Symphony 1933* reviews, Harris Papers, box 42.

as instinctively.’<sup>27</sup> Organicist imagery, a mainstay of symphonic criticism in the nineteenth century, linked music and music-developmental processes metaphorically to the natural order using language that blended connotations of sex, science, and botany.<sup>28</sup> Byron Adams has incisively contextualised the ‘germ’ metaphor in early twentieth-century Sibelius reception as a potent metaphor of virility.<sup>29</sup> It alluded to ‘germ plasm’, which, following German biologist August Weissman’s influential theorisation of the 1880s, was thought to be an element of sexual reproduction (now known to be the genes inside egg and sperm cells).<sup>30</sup> The passage bears further sexual connotations: ‘short-breathed,’ and the phallic imagery of ‘broaden and lengthen’. Needless to say, this commentary presupposed the naturalness of Harris’s ‘right’ to inhabit the West: as Slonimsky put it, ‘His music is born, not invented’.<sup>31</sup>

Even negative reviews stayed in the same territory. Although in the *New York Times* Olin Downes called the symphony an ‘ineptitude’, he nonetheless used the qualifying adjective ‘American’. The overlap in other reviewers’ vocabularies with the language of heroism and masculinity in Downes’s more idolatry writings on Sibelius makes his refusal to champion Harris’s symphony particularly noteworthy.<sup>32</sup> As Glenda Dawn Goss notes, Downes commended Sibelius’s ‘manly’ and ‘savage’ scores: for instance, the Second Symphony was ‘gloriously rude’;<sup>33</sup> the Fourth spurred him to write of ‘eternal and unconquerable heroism’<sup>34</sup> and ‘primeval power’.<sup>35</sup> For Downes, who had seen Harris’s score before the New York performance and attended some rehearsals, *Symphony 1933* did not live up to expectations: ‘The structure of the piece, its map on paper, and some of its motives, have the creative seed and offer good

<sup>27</sup> Parker, “Manifold, Abundant, Individual.” Levy also discusses this review: Levy, ““The White Hope of American Music’,” 149.

<sup>28</sup> For a recent interrogation of how the organic realm and its botanical metaphors fostered Germanic idealist musical ideologies, particularly musical unity and seemingly autonomous goal-directed growth, see Holly Watkins, “Towards a Post-Humanist Organicism”, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 14 (2017), 93–114.

<sup>29</sup> Byron Adams, ““Thor’s Hammer”: Sibelius and British Music Critics, 1905–1957,” in *Jean Sibelius and His World*, ed. Daniel M. Grimley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 142–3.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, August Weissman, *The Germ-Plasm: A Theory of Hereditary*, trans. W. Newton Parker and Harriet Rönnfeldt (London: Scott, 1883); P. Kyle Stanford, ‘August Weissman’s Theory of the Germ-Plasm and the Problem of Unconceived Alternatives’, *History and Philosophy of Life Sciences* 27 (2005), 163–99.

<sup>31</sup> Nicolas Slonimsky, “From the West: Composer New to Bostonians – Background for Roy Harris About to be Heard at Symphony Hall,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, 24 January 1934; Harris Papers, box 42.

<sup>32</sup> Glenda Dawn Goss, *Jean Sibelius and Olin Downes: Music, Friendship, Criticism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 37 and 97. According to Goss, “Gloriously Rude” was the headline for Downes’s *Boston Post* review of the Second Symphony on 7 January 1911.

<sup>34</sup> Olin Downes, “A New Finnish Symphony,” *Boston Post*, 4 August 1912; Goss, *Jean Sibelius and Olin Downes*, 55.

<sup>35</sup> Downes, “Sibelius Symphony Features,” *Boston Post*, 14 November 1914; Goss, *Jean Sibelius and Olin Downes*, 56.

opportunities for symphonic development. For this writer, the promise of the symphony stops there. ... There is little genuine organic development'.<sup>36</sup>

Downes's evaluation notwithstanding, for most of the reviewers the work seemed to represent a certain kind of subjectivity writ large. And that subjectivity, as Levy explains, was firmly located by the reviewers in the Western landscape of Harris's boyhood.<sup>37</sup> Supposedly born in a log cabin on, of all days, Abraham Lincoln's birthday,<sup>38</sup> Harris had spent his early years in Oklahoma before moving to California while still a child. These two far-flung states together formed a locus for a catch-all notion of the American 'West' crucial to the Harris 'myth'. The westward route from Oklahoma to California had added cultural significance in Harris's day: John Steinbeck was to appropriate it for his protagonists in *The Grapes of Wrath*, which he began writing in 1938, responding to the Oklahoma Dust Bowl of the mid-1930s.<sup>39</sup> Further biographical detailing of Harris's farm-working, truck-driving youth did nothing to dispel the all-American mythology that emerged around the composer in the written media, and everything to strengthen the supposed authenticity of his voice to be able to speak for the American people. Western 'authenticity' was here contrasted with (and explicitly constructed against) East Coast – and therefore European-influenced – superficiality;<sup>40</sup> for instance, the critics downplayed the formative significance of Harris's cosmopolitan Parisian education under Boulanger. According to Slonimsky, in an article introducing the composer to Bostonians in advance of the premiere of *Symphony 1933*, Harris's was a life that 'presents a picture of individualistic endeavour, culminating with success in high places ... When his parents (Scotch-Irish) arrived in 1898 in Lincoln County, Oklahoma, they had an oxcart, some provisions, an ax [sic] and a gun. They staked their claims, cut down trees, built the house.'<sup>41</sup> Such implicit – and not so implicit – parallels that were frequently drawn between Harris's apparently rough-

<sup>36</sup> 'An American ineptitude', Olin Downes, "Harris Symphony Has Premiere Here," *The New York Times*, 1 February 1934, 9.

<sup>37</sup> See Levy, "The White Hope of American Music", especially 144–51.

<sup>38</sup> As Dan Stehman has noted, little documentation remains of Harris's early years, meaning that historians have had to rely on the composer's own recollections, which 'proved increasingly unreliable as time passed.' See Stehman, *Roy Harris: A Biography*, 1.

<sup>39</sup> John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: Penguin, 2000), originally published 1939.

<sup>40</sup> For example, as Slonimsky declared: 'his music ... reflects not the European ready-made manufacture, but a free and somewhat mysterious firmament of America.' Slonimsky, "From the West." For further discussion of Slonimsky's article, see Levy, "The White Hope of American Music", 145–46.

<sup>41</sup> Slonimsky, "From the West."

and-ready origins and the mythological figure of the pioneer settler hardly happened by accident, and recall the myth-building around Harris's older contemporary Carl Ruggles. Landscape, transcendentalism, and questions of what constitutes authenticity for American identity are similarly thematised in the commentaries on Ruggles's broadly contemporary works such as *Men and Mountains* (1924, revised in 1936) or *Sun-treader* (1932).<sup>42</sup>

The biographical trope of Harris as pioneer, then, performs significant ideological work.<sup>43</sup> It invokes liberal discourses of land ownership to legitimise the composer's presence and freedom in Western landscapes while complementing suggestions of his artistic sovereignty. In an article exploring authorship and intellectual property law, Keith Aoki uncovers the robust connection between 'property' and 'sovereignty' in Anglo-American jurisdiction.<sup>44</sup> Aoki argues that the conceptions of authorship, property, and sovereignty that shape liberal ideology are indebted to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Romantic ideologies of the artist and of individual creative thought. What is critical is how these ideologies blurred the distinctions between the categories of authorship and ownership, largely because both are pervaded by the notion of sovereignty underwriting the model of the Romantic artist. Aoki traces this to Enlightenment discourses where the emerging idea of a free individual was wedded to the concept of private property – that is, the private civil realm that the sovereign individual inhabited. As he shows, this is the intellectual climate from which Anglo-American conceptions of authorship originate, indicating just how closely embroiled with one another authorship and ownership have historically been. Folding them together becomes a particularly deft ideological sleight of hand; in the reception of *Symphony 1933* something similar is taking place around Harris's status as both composer and settler.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, the discussion in Deniz Ertan, "When Men and Mountains Meet: Ruggles, Whitman, and their Landscapes," *American Music* 27 (2009).

<sup>43</sup> For a broader comparative examination of musical biography's vast potential to embody the ideologies of, and undertake cultural work within, specific reading communities, see Christopher Wiley, *Re-writing Composers' Lives: Critical Historiography and Musical Biography*, 2 Vols. (PhD dissertation, University of London, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Keith Aoki, "(Intellectual) Property and Sovereignty: Notes Toward a Cultural Geography of Authorship," *Stanford Law Review* 48 (1996): 1297.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. See also: Rosemary J. Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation and the Law* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Coombe, "Authorial Cartographies: Mapping Proprietary Borders in a Less-Than-Brave New World," *Stanford Law Review* 48 (1996).

In addition, the reviewers' rhetorics that situate the work and its composer in the West acquire some of their power from appropriating an existing set of rhetorics pertaining specifically to the symphonic genre and its historically associated discourses of masculinity, idealism, organicism, and nation-building. As the value system against which Downes assessed Harris's symphony indicates, metaphors of organicism and of masculinity entrenched in both symphonic discourse and discussion of the American landscape made it easy to sublate the idea of the West within discourses already associated with the genre. Organicism, as Levy has shown, has a dual function in relation to Harris's tonal language, negotiating the oppositions between idealistic Romanticism and 'scientific systematising', two aspects of modernity that his music assimilates.<sup>46</sup> Although organic imagery signified something idealist in the sense of growth towards the boundless skies, such language equally channelled early twentieth-century biological discourses: divisions into irreducible, interchangeable units of 'seed' and 'germ' and their internal, self-propelling growth logics.<sup>47</sup> But there is a spatial implication too, and the casual identity that Downes drew up between score and 'map' is revealing. Hence the contradictory impulses smoothed by organicist metaphors intersect with the oppositional spatial impulses associated with the West and, as explored in greater detail below, the symphonic genre.

### **American identity and self-determinism in *Symphony 1933***

Levy has demonstrated the extent to which Harris had a hand in manipulating and controlling his self-image, invoking frontiersman spirit to his advantage.<sup>48</sup> His contribution to *Symphony 1933*'s programme note is a good example where, in what one reviewer called a 'formidable postulate',<sup>49</sup> Harris marked out the ambitious proportions and philosophical scope for the identity the work sought to project:

In the first movement I have tried to capture the mood of adventure and physical exuberance; in the second, of the pathos which seems to underlie all human existence; in the third, the mood of a positive will to power and action.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Levy, "Roy Harris and the Crisis of Consonance," in *Tonality 1900-1950: Concept and Practice*, eds. Felix Wörner, Ullrich Scheideler and Philip Ernst Rupprecht (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 249.

<sup>47</sup> Adams, "'Thor's Hammer,'" 142-43.

<sup>48</sup> Levy, "'The White Hope of American Music,'" especially 141-42 and 150.

<sup>49</sup> Cyrus W. Durgin, "Music: Symphony Hall Boston Symphony Orchestra," *Daily Boston Globe*, January 27, 1934.

<sup>50</sup> Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) concert programme, Season 53 (1933-1934), Symphony Hall, Boston, 26 and 27 January 1934, 646.

Glossing over the influence of Nietzschean rhetoric, although this identity drew in part on Romantic notions of human universals, the flanking commentary shaped it as distinctly American: Harris's comments followed John N. Burk's introductory discussion of how Harris and his music evoked 'an undeniable air of the West', and how those who had written about its 'vast prairies', 'open space', and 'cowboy origins' participated strongly in America's 'persisting racial self-consciousness and root-seeking'.<sup>51</sup> Mirroring the simultaneously inwards and outwards striving impulses that characterised many of his musings on American subjectivity (later in the programme he is quoted as remarking that 'our [American] dignity lies in direct driving force; our deeper feelings are stark and reticent'),<sup>52</sup> Harris here articulates an externalised impulse towards progress – 'the mood of physical adventure' – that contrasts with Romantic introspection. Significant, however, is how in the programme note Romantic universalising discourses about human experience are casually transposed onto American identity, a move that colonises the space of American experience for those who conceive nineteenth-century Western philosophy as their intellectual heritage. Harris's words also confirm the ongoing currency of Romantic ideologies that held the symphonic genre to be the prime musical vehicle for projecting a universalised notion of human subjectivity. Contemporary theorists similarly argued that the symphonic genre functions to collectivise subjective authorial experience. Writing in 1917, for instance, German music critic Paul Bekker suggested that symphonies bring a unified communal identity – the *Hörerschaft* – into being for the duration of the work's performance.<sup>53</sup> As a medium of biographical myth-making, then, it bridges the gulf between individual biography and wider formulations of collective national identity.

Driven musically by self-generative processes that parallel individual self-determinism, the symphony is a genre that takes human subjectivity as its subject matter, and in *Symphony 1933* Harris's symphonic subject, like the pioneer, is active and free moving. Since few scholars aside from Levy and

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 644.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 654.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Bekker, *Die Sinfonie von Beethoven bis Mahler* (Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1918), 16-17.

Harris biographer Dan Stehman have paid *Symphony 1933* much critical or analytical attention, it is instructive to provide a brief overview of the work and Harris's highly ideological tonal and developmental musical principles to complement discussions of its reception in relation to musical biography, American identity, and the Harris 'myth'.<sup>54</sup> Despite the energy around the work at the Boston premiere, more recent commentators have been less forgiving about its shortcomings: for instance, Malcolm D. Robertson cites overenthusiastic use of ostinati, excessive repetitions, dependence on motivic devices, and a slackness in the structure, largely confirming the same weaknesses in *Symphony 1933* identified by Stehman.<sup>55</sup>

Resisting conventional nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European symphonic models, and therefore asserting an individuality ideologically aligned with the Enlightenment-era early Classical symphony, *Symphony 1933* has only three movements, marked *Allegro*, *Andante*, and *Maestoso*. Characterised by driving, irregular rhythmic patterns and phrase lengths, the first movement lurches into action with a pounding timpani triplet '3+2' rhythmic motif, shrill woodwind, and forthright brass. Although tripartite, the movement's structural principles depart from traditional sonata form: the first section has neither a secondary theme, nor the clear sense of two competing keys that would gesture emphatically towards early classical monothematic sonata form, for instance. As Stehman observes, virtually the whole movement can be derived, instead, from the opening timpani rhythmic motif (bar 1),

<sup>54</sup> A useful overview of *Symphony 1933* is to be found in Malcolm D. Robertson, "Roy Harris's Symphonies: an Introduction (I)," *Tempo* 207 (1998): 9-14. See also Levy's description of the first movement in: Levy, "'The White Hope of American Music,'" 146-48. Stehman's doctoral thesis offers a more comprehensive analysis of the work: Stehman, "The Symphonies of Roy Harris: An Analytical Study of the Linear Materials and of Related Works" (Ph.D., University of Southern California, 1973).

<sup>55</sup> Stehman, "The Symphonies of Roy Harris," 93; Robertson, "Roy Harris's Symphonies," 10.

its retrograde, and the initial theme (bars 11–28).<sup>56</sup> Writing of the third movement, Harris coined a label

Figure 1: Roy Harris, *Symphony 1933*, first movement, bars 174–194, violin 1 and 2, modified with reference to manuscript score (Harris Papers, box 6) from example in: Levy, “Roy Harris and the Crisis of Consonance,” 250.



for such design in relation to his melodic work: ‘autogenetic’ – self-generative – invoking quasi-biological terminology, as well as the self-reliance of the pioneer.<sup>57</sup> Others adopted similar language: in his *Boston Evening Transcript* pre-concert article, Slonimsky presented Harris’s melodic line as ‘heliotropic’, evoking the image of growth towards the sun.<sup>58</sup>

Levy identifies precisely this kind of ‘heliotropic’ melodic design in the first movement’s second theme [see Figure 1].<sup>59</sup> After the bravado of the first theme (bars 11–28), in this middle section (bars 174–282), Harris finds a more reflective mode. A soaring, lyrical, melody in the strings is introduced (bars 174–194), twice varied and restated. As Levy has shown, the same passage also illustrates clearly one of Harris’s most important tonal principles, which centres on his treatment of the tonic as an anchor that ‘provides solidity while the superimposition of two or more modes allows for interestingly variable scale degrees.’<sup>60</sup> The tonic is a starting point for exploration: multiple meandering directions may be

<sup>56</sup> See Stehman, “The Symphonies of Roy Harris,” 89.

<sup>57</sup> BSO concert programme, 648.

<sup>58</sup> Slonimsky, “From the West.”

<sup>59</sup> Levy, “‘The White Hope of American Music,’” 148.

<sup>60</sup> Levy, “Roy Harris and the Crisis of Consonance,” 249.



taken and retraced. The movement culminates in a powerful fortissimo bitonal dissonance scored for full orchestra: an E flat minor triad jars against an arpeggiated D major triad picked out in the upper woodwind and brass.

Harris employs a free rondo form in the sinuous second movement, *Andante*. It opens and closes in E minor, with A minor as a secondary tonal centre; the principal theme initially appears in the viola part, from bars 22 to 32. Legato passages for solo woodwind intertwine with solo string writing, occasionally punctured by pizzicato strings. Once again loosely situating the symphony and its subjects within rural spaces, in the programme note Harris identified these woodwind passages as ‘pastoral’.<sup>61</sup> The finale evokes the same unrelenting motion as the previous movements but is primarily energised by juxtaposing contrasting gestural material. The structure is derived from a single theme (bars 1–8) – this is the melody Harris specifically referred to as ‘autogenetic’ – which he develops, varies, and transforms through canon, imitation, and other contrapuntal devices. By musically paralleling the self-reliance and exploratory qualities characteristic of the pioneering self-made man, then, Harris used numerous musical strategies indirectly to reinforce his own biographical claims to that status.<sup>62</sup>

### **Legitimising white presence in the West**

Yet the vision of selfhood that Harris’s symphony affirmed was anything but one with which Americans could commonly identify. Slonimsky’s article covering the upcoming Boston premiere alluded to the symbolic and deeply racialised kind of dominant American subjectivity represented by composers such as Harris and Ruggles, using a seemingly irreverent reference to the language of livestock sales: ‘Roy Harris of Oklahoma, thirty-five, white, and healthy, is well-equipped to be a musical emissary.’<sup>63</sup> It is worth noting that the dominant narrative of westward progress that privileges this subjectivity runs at ninety degrees to the south to north axis of early twentieth-century African-American migration, and

<sup>61</sup> BSO concert programme, 646.

<sup>62</sup> See also closely related discussion in Levy, “The White Hope of American Music,” 148.

<sup>63</sup> Slonimsky, “From the West.” The livestock comparison is Levy’s: see Levy, “The White Hope of American Music,” 151.

counter to the nineteenth-century west to east migration of Chinese railroad labourers and miners, while the ethnic cleansing and enforced migrations of Native Americans followed no general trend.<sup>64</sup> Levy illuminates further the racial aspects of the Harris ‘myth’, a composer cast as the ‘white hope’ for American music, and the importance consequently placed on his “‘Scotch-Irish” lineage’.<sup>65</sup>

Close reading of the reviews that document Harris’s contemporary reception furnishes insight into the strategies by which the composer was symbolically naturalised in Western landscapes in ways that aimed implicitly to legitimise their occupation by white settlers in general. In line with paradigms governing the European Enlightenment project, those naturalisation strategies were rationalist, sanitised, and cerebral, obscuring the brutality of the West’s colonisation. The organicist and quasi-biological imagery – phrases like ‘germ-idea’,<sup>66</sup> ‘heliotropic’, or ‘autogenetic’ – sought to locate the white subjectivity of Harris’s pioneering symphony within the natural order, insidiously suggesting that was where it rightfully belonged. ‘Heliotropic’ in particular, suggesting skyward botanical growth, also carried the implication that land was something interchangeable, into which settlers could therefore plant roots both literally and metaphorically.

Perhaps a more important legitimising strategy, however, was the use of language pointing to the rationalising liberal discourses of land ownership that underpinned Harris’s role in constructing a certain vision of the West – ‘the West that bred Mr Harris and in which he works most eagerly’, in Parker’s previously quoted review. Far from organic, then, Harris’s biographical connections with Western landscapes acted as a conduit for the pervasive and entrenched binding together of labour, property, and sovereignty within the liberal ideology elucidated by Aoki above, predicating individual autonomy on property and the ownership of the products of one’s (creative) labour. But this paradigm of autonomy appeared increasingly unsustainable in the 1930s where, as *The Grapes of Wrath* reveals, artisanal models of ownership, labour, and production were imperilled by new processes of industrial farming. Nonetheless, the following quotation from Steinbeck’s novel elucidates clearly the same sense of

<sup>64</sup> Brückner and Hsu, *American Literary Geographies*, 16.

<sup>65</sup> Levy, “‘The White Hope of American Music’,” especially 151-55.

<sup>66</sup> Slonimsky, “From the West.”

ownership and autonomy channelled by the Harris ‘myth’, even as it was undermined by wider contemporary economic imperatives:

Sure, cried the tenant man, but it’s our land. We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on, died on it. ... That’s what makes it ours – being born on it, working it, dying on it. That makes ownership.<sup>67</sup>

The voice of the tenant man weds rationalist measurement and labour to ideas of property ownership, expressed in the emotive rhetoric of belonging and identity. Steinbeck articulated a romanticised relationship between land and biographical life-cycle which aimed to express just how tightly land and identity – particularly, and perversely, given their historically recent occupation of the American landscape, white male identity – were enmeshed in the cultural consciousness.

### **Liberalism’s spatial ideologies and the symphonic genre**

Liberal discourses underpinned the various strategies implicated in how the sense of American identity constructed through Harris’s biography were expanded outwards and collectivised in the national imagination. The vision of the West that emerges from *Symphony 1933*’s reception clearly prioritises liberal values and narratives: for instance, in the recurring allusions to sovereign, autonomous subjectivity, and the tacit role played by liberal discourses of land ownership to authenticate Harris’s biographical claims to the West. Indeed, the West as an ideological construct is arguably emblematic of Bruckner and Hsu’s previously discussed vision of how landscape is conditioned by liberalism as an endless space that affords free motion. Likewise, the symphony is a genre heavily implicated in liberal ideology; Bekker’s vision of the symphony’s intended audience can be traced back to the genre’s Enlightenment origins, aligning with the infinite scope and reach of the democratic movement. On the one hand the symphony is an idealist, expansionist project; on the other, it directs its lens to the subjective interior, and musically it demands that the composer disavow and unitise according to rationalising structuring principles. That all-encompassing social impulse towards Bekker’s *Hörerschaft*

<sup>67</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 35.

makes the symphonic genre very much consonant with the ‘infinitely expandable’ spatial ideology of liberalism. Alexander Rehding has excavated the strong ideological charge to the vast imagined spaces conjured by the symphonic genre for 1930s German musicologists Arnold Schering and Heinrich Bessler;<sup>68</sup> by contrast, the spaces that *Symphony 1933* projected in the concert hall, its contemporary reception suggested, were those of the American West.

Perhaps, then, the most profound of the strategies that combined to merge symphonic space with the space of the West are the imbricated ideological tensions that structure both imagined spaces. Like the symphony, the mythology of the West was just as much an idealising project as it was a rationalising one, caught between two opposing impulses: the transcendental, utopian ideal of the West that drew settlers out there, and the rationalist projects that established and perpetuated colonial claims to the land. Yet despite the idealism behind expansionist ideologies under the banner of manifest destiny, historically the ideological and legal foundations for American westward expansion owed much to obviously rationalist conceptualisations of space. European ideologies of spatial abstraction, homogeneity, and reproducibility arguably underscored the whole project of federalism after America obtained political sovereignty in the late eighteenth century, and underscored westward expansion. Yvonne Elizabeth Pelletier puts this concisely as ‘The collective will to see ... all geographies as equally available for transformation’.<sup>69</sup> This is the narrative of which the nostalgic, nineteenth-century Western pioneer-figure was the protagonist, after whom Harris, aided by the press, fashioned his public image.

Early US federal land ordinances such as the North West Ordinance of 1787 emphasised the rationalist aspect to the liberal dynamic between sovereign individual and space.<sup>70</sup> As literary scholar Michele Currie Navakas has argued, invoking Martin Brückner’s work on cartography, a sense of a ‘modern homogenous spatiality’ facilitated the creation of a unified nationhood out of the geographical

<sup>68</sup> See Alexander Rehding, *Music and Monumentality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), especially 172-80.

<sup>69</sup> Yvonne Elizabeth Pelletier, “False Promises and Real Estate: Land Speculation and Millennial Maps in Herman Melville’s *Confidence-Man*,” in *American Literary Geographies*, ed. Brückner and Hsu, 192.

<sup>70</sup> For further information see, for example, Peter S. Onuf, *Statehood and Union: A History of the Northwest Ordinance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

diversity of the North American continent, underwriting the logic of America's political sovereignty.<sup>71</sup> From the ground up, the authorities measured the landscape into units of property and rationalised human subjects as rights-bearing owners as a basis for endlessly replicating and extending a hegemonic model of law and governance under a centralised power. As such, westward expansionism is fundamentally embroiled historically in those liberal discourses explored by Aoki, which were indebted to the notion of land as interchangeable property – as fungible and anonymous – and which blurred the boundaries between property and the sovereignty of the individual. Steinbeck put it trenchantly in a critique of American 'individualism' in *The Grapes of Wrath*: 'the quality of owning freezes you forever into "I", and cuts you off forever from the "we"'.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the democratising social impulse historically associated with the symphonic genre, then, it is perhaps its spatial implications that had the greatest power to absorb and perpetuate the idealised West's inherent contradictions in the myth-making surrounding *Symphony 1933*. Symphonic discourses inherited from the nineteenth century offered existing conceptual furrows that translate onto the contradictory outwards and inwards striving impulses structuring both the West and American subjectivities, buttressing the hold of the imagined West in the cultural imagination. The symphony's immense, even (to invoke Gustav Mahler) world-encompassing musical frame is congruent with the horizonless reach of the West. Yet it contrasts with the genre's rationalising modernist musical imperatives to control at the most detailed motivic level, congruent in turn with the rationalising projects of dissection into small units that underpinned Westward expansionism, or the homogenous, reproducible spaces of industrial capitalism. The critical elision of Harris's symphony and the landscapes of the West suggests that, insofar as it is a modernist project of musical dissection, it is also ideologically allied with colonialist projects to dominate the landscape of the West. And these abstract, homogenous, infinitely expandable liberal spaces were vital correlates for the sense of identity constructed by the Harris 'myth'. Just as the

<sup>71</sup> Michele Currie Navakas, "Island Nation: Mapping Florida, Revising America," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 11 (2013): 246; she cites Martin Brückner, *Early American Cartographies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>72</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 158.

space of the West and the space of the symphony claimed to be infinitely expandable, so too did the particular kind of all-American identity projected by Harris feign boundless inclusivity. The way in which white settlers sought to level Western plains of histories of cultivation and occupation by diverse ethnic groups functions as a spatial analogue here. This was an identity that levelled the diversity of human experience onto one homogenous plane recalling Currie Navakas's 'modern homogenous spatiality', racialised as white.

## Conclusion

Levy's work on *Symphony 1933* points to how integrally issues of musical biography are imbricated in wider identity formation; this article has spotlighted some ideological mechanisms that smooth the connection between the two areas. Together, then, Harris's biography, his symphonic music, and its landscapes animate a particular kind of American selfhood in the public imagination. That selfhood is conditioned by a liberal ideology that asserts the abstraction, homogeneity, and reproducibility of space. Harris's reflections on American identity gestured towards a national identity full of contradictions. It appeared timeless, but had yet explicitly to reach maturity. It scanned the world beyond the frontier, but also looked inwards in its search for authenticity, caught between the transcendentalist impulse towards the infinite skyline and the rationalist impulse to control, dissect, and limit. Rooted in a collectively imagined past era of nation forming and struggle, it had its eyes fixed on the horizon, with a keen sense of advancing ahead through both space and time. To quote Leon Mandel, America is a nation that 'narrates itself as novel, singular, and in forward motion.'<sup>73</sup> Yet the kind of American subjectivity and narrative performed by Harris's symphony, and the profoundly ideological role played by the connection between Harris's biography and idealised notions of the American landscape, comes at the cost of the other subjectivities and narratives, both American and otherwise, that it erases and silences.

<sup>73</sup> Leon Mandel, *Driven: The American Four-Wheeled Love Affair* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977), 76, quoted in Cotten Seiler, *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 8-9.

This prompts some closing thoughts on the ethical priorities of scholarship in musical biography. If we cannot always recover marginalised voices, we at least have a responsibility to identify the means, structures, and institutions by which such identities have been effaced, so that we can call out those processes as they continue to be reimagined in the present. Given musical biography's historically canonising tendencies, its associated scholarship can usefully analyse how ideas about sovereignty are ideologically legitimised, supplying some potentially destabilising questions about how and why white identities so powerfully continue to condition our idea of the liberal 'citizen'. Counterintuitively, then, through its attention to the material and sonic traces of biographical presences, what research in musical biography might offer above all is a way of becoming more alert to human absences.